



NEWS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 1994

OH-58C HELICOPTER DOWN IN NORTH KOREA

Secretary of Defense William J. Perry confirmed today that an unarmed U.S. Army OH-58C observation helicopter strayed into North Korean airspace at about 11:03 a.m. Saturday Korean time (9:03 p.m. Friday EST) and went down in Kungang County in the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK). It is unclear whether the helicopter made an emergency landing or was shot down, as the North Korean press has reported. At this time the condition of the two-man crew is not known.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher has been in touch this morning with Congressman Bill Richardson (D-NM), who arrived in Pyongyang on a previously scheduled trip shortly after the incident occurred, accompanied by a State Department official. Congressman Richardson, who was first informed of the incident by the DPRK Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed his deep concern, asked for an explanation and urged immediate steps to ensure the welfare and prompt return of the crew. In phone conversations with Secretary Christopher, the Congressman reported that his North Korean hosts described the incident as unfortunate and said that it was under investigation. At the request of Secretary Christopher, Mr. Richardson will continue to press the North Koreans for further information, for access to the crew and for their prompt return.

State Department officials have also communicated with the North Koreans through their Mission to the United Nations in New York to insist on the urgency of information on the incident, as well as for prompt access to the crew.

U.S. Forces Korea has identified the crewmen as Chief Warrant Officer (CW2) David Hilemon of Clarksville, Tenn. and CW2 Bobby Hall of Brooksville, Fla. Both are members of A Company, 4th Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment of Camp Page, Republic of Korea. Their families have been notified. The crew was undertaking a routine training mission.

We have conflicting reports about the incident and will provide more information as soon as we can confirm the details.

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE December 19, 1994 (703) 697-5737 (public/industry)

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ISSUES STATEMENT ON DEATH OF U.S. HELICOPTER PILOT

Secretary of Defense Will J. Perry issued the following statement today following the death of a U.S. Army helicopter pilot in North Korea yesterday:

I was deeply sorry to learn of Chief Warrant Officer David Hilemon's death after his helicopter was downed in North Korea. Warrant Officer Hilemon was a true patriot who served his country with professionalism and dedication. The Hilemon family is in my thoughts and prayers.

The United States is working to secure the prompt return of his body, along with the release of Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Hall, who is alive.

The Defense Department has launched a full investigation of the circumstances that led to this tragic loss on a routine training flight. Results will be reported as this investigation reaches its conclusion.

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 COMMENTS ABOUT HELICOPTER DOWNED IN KOREA, AS QUOTED IN THE MEDIA
 DECEMBER 20, 22, 1944

ABC-TV program, PETER JENNINGS: The Clinton Administration has tried again to convince the North Koreans to release an American pilot. It has been three days since his helicopter was brought down over North Korea.

"ABC World News Tonight"

Here's ABC's John McWethy.

JOHN MCWETHY: As a precaution, American helicopters are now prohibited from flying near the border with North Korea until the U.S. can figure out exactly what happened last weekend. Intelligence officials admit that attempts to use spy satellites and surveillance aircraft to photograph where the U.S. believes the helicopter went down have failed to find any evidence. The U.S. suspects North Korea either quickly moved it or covered it.

A meeting today with the North Koreans at Panmunjom produced very little, except growing impatience by the Clinton Administration.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM PERRY: The report that I've gotten from that meeting was that no substantial progress was made. That's not a satisfactory answer, as far as I'm concerned.

MCWETHY: The U.S. is demanding that the two pilots be returned, one of whom North Korea says is dead, and for the helicopter to be sent back, as well.

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: A further delay here in returning the pilot and the remains of the pilot would be of great concern to us and would affect the atmosphere in which we've been hoping to improve our relations with North Korea.

MCWETHY: North Korea has so much at stake here, promises from the West of \$4 billion in nuclear plants, that many analysts believe they have no choice but to give in quickly.

PROFESSOR HAN PARK [University of Georgia]: They're not going to sit on it for weeks and months. It will be a matter of days, if not hours.

MCWETHY: But for the moment, North Korea remains silent, apparently having great difficulty believing that this was just an accident.

John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.

NBC-TV program, "NBC Nightly News," December 22, 1994

BROKAW: At the White House tonight there's serious business to go with the holiday spirit. It's keeping the pressure on North Korea to return that American pilot captured when his helicopter went down. The body of the other American was returned today.

And NBC's Andrea Mitchell has more now.

ANDREA MITCHELL: At Fort Campbell, Kentucky, family and friends mourned the death of helicopter pilot David Hilemon, whose remains were flown home today. Congressman Bill Richardson, who brought Hilemon's coffin across the DMZ, said the surviving pilot, Bobby Hall, is being held at a remote military base. But U.S. officials have no idea where or whether Hall will be released soon, as the North Koreans have promised.

SECRETARY PERRY: We have intelligence-collection resources which are very good at answering some questions. They are not very good at locating an individual in a closed society.

DEE DEE MYERS: We certainly urge the North Koreans to release him by Christmas. And we're hopeful but we have no guarantees.

MITCHELL: What is clear is that North Korean diplomats are not in control of the situation. The military is. But are they just obeying orders from Korea's mysterious leader, Kim Jong-il?

REP. RICHARDSON: He wouldn't see me. I tried to see the military, that I think is calling a lot of the shots in North Korea. There could be a power vacuum.

MITCHELL: U.S. officials are concerned that what may be delaying Hall's return is a power struggle in North Korea.

Andrea Mitchell, NBC News, Washington.

CBS-TV program, "CBS EVENING NEWS," December 22, 1994

CHUNG: It was a grim but familiar ceremony today in the no-man's-land between North and South Korea. The body of a U.S. military pilot was returned by the North, but one other American is still a captive.

Correspondent David Martin reports from the Pentagon.

DAVID MARTIN: The body of Chief Warrant Officer David Hilemon began its last journey home at the line which divides North and South Korea, the most heavily armed border in the world today. Once across, the casket was opened and the identity verified. The body was immediately flown to California, where an autopsy will be performed to determine the cause of death.

Right now, U.S. officials can only repeat what Congressman Bill Richardson, who arranged the release, has been told by the North Koreans.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM PERRY: The North Korean air defense system shot down the helicopter and the pilot died because of trauma received in the crash.

MARTIN: His partner, Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Hall, is said to be alive and well, but still being held at a remote military base near where the chopper went down.

REP. BILL RICHARDSON: He's probably very lonely right now up in the mountains, unable to know what's happening.

MARTIN: Although U.S. officials have insisted the pilots accidentally strayed into North Korea while on a routine training mission, the North Koreans say they want to make sure it wasn't a spy flight.

SECRETARY PERRY: They are conducting an investigation into the helicopter. They're interrogating Hall. They're reading the documents that were with the airplane.

MARTIN: Based on what Richardson has told them, U.S. officials expect Hall to be released soon, but only if the North Koreans do not feel pressured. So, for the moment, the Clinton Administration has stopped warning of dire consequences if Hall does not come home right away.

David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.

ABC-TV Program, "ABC World News Tonight," December 22, 1994

SAWYER: The White House urged North Korea again today to release the American pilot they are holding by Christmas. Last night the North Koreans released the body of Warrant Officer David Hilemon, the American who died when their helicopter went down.

Here's ABC's John McWethy.

JOHN MCWETHY: The fact that North Korea handed over the body of Warrant Officer Hilemon in a ceremony with dignity was considered a good sign by American officials. North Korean soldiers escorted the plain wooden coffin to the dividing line between North and South Korea, where it was then turned over to a United Nations honor guard. The body is now at Travis Air Force Base in California, where an autopsy is being performed this evening to determine how Hilemon died and to look for clues about how his helicopter was forced out of the sky when it strayed over North Korean territory.

Defense Secretary Perry says, at this point, he only knows what the North Koreans have told the U.S. about the crash.

SECRETARY PERRY: That the North Korean air defense system shot down the helicopter and the pilot died because of trauma received in the crash.

MCWETHY: Congressman Bill Richardson, who escorted the body of Hilemon out of North Korea, said he tried but failed to negotiate the immediate freedom of the pilot who survived the incident, Warrant Officer Bobby Hall.

REP. RICHARDSON: But I have hopes that Christmas or earlier will be the time that Bobby Hall gets out. That's just my gut feeling, but there was no ironclad commitment on that.

MCWETHY: In Florida, Bobby Hall's wife, two children and his parents are suffering through the days of waiting.

DIANE HALL [mother]: Even though they say he's okay and unharmed, I'll believe that when I see it.

MCWETHY: So the family keeps watching television for some word. And half a world away on the other side of the demilitarized zone, the North Korean government is reportedly engaged in a power struggle over what to do with Bobby Hall.

John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.